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## Review of *Cather Studies* Volume 3. Edited by Susan J. Rosowski

Patrick W. Shaw

*Texas Tech University*

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*Cather Studies*. Volume 3. Edited by Susan J. Rosowski. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Index. vii + 303 pp. \$45.00.

With some notable exceptions, the fourteen essays in this collection come from critics well-known to the most casual reader of Cather scholarship—John J. Murphy, Merrill Maguire Skaggs, and Marilyn Arnold, for example. Because their views and interdependence are familiar, the reader should be at ease traveling through some of the best traditional criticism of Willa Cather's fiction.

The collection is at its best, however, in essays that deviate from the familiar and traditional. Ann Romines's "Her Mortal Enemy's Daughter: Cather and the Writing of Age" is its finest piece. Immediately following John J. Murphy's "Gilt Diana and Ivory Christ: Love and Christian Charity in *My Mortal Enemy*," her secular and personal response to Cather's fiction makes this brief, poignant, and evocative essay particularly refreshing. Romines acknowledges Cather's lesbianism and the conflicts Cather faced, especially as she aged. Moreover, she recognizes that "Cather's post-1922 fiction is one of our invaluable cultural resources for confronting the coming of age."

In "'Distant and Correct': The Double Life and *The Professor's House*," another of the collection's outstanding essays, Michael Leddy argues persuasively and with astute comparisons that Cather is "a modernist in nineteenth-

century clothing." Unlike Paula Woolley's lengthy "'Fire and Wit': Storytelling and the American Artist in Cather's *My Ántonia*," which stretches the meaning of art past aesthetic tolerance to make its thesis, Leddy's concise discussion is reasonable and critically useful.

Ann Moseley's "Spatial Structures and Forms in *The Professor's House*" also benefits from brevity and focus. Though Cather's borrowing from the Dutch masters to show the world through an open window is not a new revelation, Moseley analyzes the technique to offer a needed reminder that Cather, especially in *The Professor's House*, achieved "Art with a capital A."

Romines concludes her essay on the writing of age by noting that "Cather's fiction is a resource for us all." Though referring specifically to aging, her observation applies to Cather's fiction generally. If read with an open mind, free of dogma, Cather's fiction can indeed be a resource for us all. The contrasts between essays such as Romines's and the traditional ones in this collection exemplify the point.

PATRICK W. SHAW  
Department of English  
Texas Tech University